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CertiLingua

Excellence label of plurilingual, European and international competences

Main focus

Economic globalization and continuing European integration require in a special measure the aptitude of young people to deal competently on a high level with the demands of linguistic and cultural diversity and to develop flexibility in their personal plans, further training and professional careers.

The European Commission therefore aims in its notifications and action plans to encourage the extension of plurilingual and intercultural competences in its member states as a part of lifelong learning.¹

This demand has already been implemented in the school systems of countries of the European Union in several state schools. It is part of the pedagogical profile of these schools to impart skills in several languages to students on a high level and to prepare them with adequate educational opportunities for the European dimension of a world that is growing together economically and culturally. Such schools offer, for instance, bilingual classes or use a foreign language as the working language in CLIL, arrange cross-border projects and exchange programmes, accentuate in their school curricula themes and contents which are of special importance as they prepare for international courses of studies and for future orientation in their profession and further training on an international level.

However, an internationally transparent and acknowledged certificate which clearly and comprehensibly documents the special linguistic, European and international qualifications achieved at these schools does not yet exist.

¹Commission's Action Plan for skills and mobility COM(2002)72 final; Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004 – 2006 COM(2003) 449 final; A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism COM(2005) 596 final.



In the multitude of European graduation diplomas, the special quality of bilingual education, for instance, is not yet unmistakably clear for addressees at universities and in the professional domain.

At the moment, such transparent documentation and international acknowledgement are rather attained with school-leaving diploma and certificates of non-scholastic and private educational institutions. The great public interest in such a certification emphasises that the international recognition of graduation diploma issued by state schools should be strengthened by a transparent documentation of the students' special plurilingual, European and international qualifications.

Proposal for a solution

It is proposed, to develop and to put to the test in a joint project with the responsible institutions of European partner countries a label of excellence. This label is awarded in addition to the university – entrance diploma which are a national responsibility. It documents the graduate's skill to act in the European context and internationally in two or, if applicable, further languages besides the graduate's native language.

The concerted title reads *CertiLingua European baccalaureate quality label of plurilingual, European and international competences*.

The present situation

The initiative for this project was taken by the Ministers for Education of the Netherlands and North Rhine-Westphalia, who discussed in the context of cross-border cooperation the possibilities of international certification for the support of mobility.

The resulting project draft for an *Excellence label of plurilingual, European and international competences* met with great mutual interest and was discussed by representatives of the Ministries for Education of the German federal states, as well as of the Netherlands, France, Austria, Luxembourg, Sweden, Norway and of the Flemish, Walloon and German-speaking Belgium communities and further educational institutes (et al. IQB , Cito) on the occasion of several working sessions.

The project is always open for further partners. At the moment the members of the international steering committee are:



Prof. Hartmut **Ebke**, **Deutschland (BW)**

Mr Frans **Lander**, **Niederlande**

Mr Gérard **Links**, **Frankreich**

Mr Franz **Mittendorfer** , **Österreich**

Dr. Henk **Oonk**, **Niederlande**

Mrs Henny **Rönneper**, **Deutschland (NW)**

Dr. Eike **Thürmann**, **Deutschland (NW)**

The concept in detail

The concept is based on the national baccalaureate examinations and their recognition all over Europe by the European Convention no.15 of the 'Equality of Diplomas' of 11 December, 1953. Admission to study courses in host countries relies in addition to the acknowledged school-leaving certificate on an adequate knowledge of the host country's language. The *Excellence label of plurilingual, European and international competences CertiLingua* certifies with a label of excellence as an additive to the national school leaving certificate that the graduate has acquired special competences for a continuation of his or her course of education in a European and international context.

The following elements are recommended by the workgroup that is open to all German federal states for the arrangement of this label:

- Requirements

With the *Excellence label of plurilingual, European and international competences CERTILINGUA* the following competences are certified:

Linguistic competences:

- The candidates have written and oral command of at least two languages other than their native/ first language on level B2 of the *Common European Framework for Languages* (multilingual competences)

and

- They have successfully used at least one of these languages as their learning and working language in one or more CLIL courses over a longer period of time or in several modules. With this language or these languages they have a solid basis at their disposal to continue their own course of education in international contexts (bilingual competences, CLIL, EMILE).

and

European and international competences:

The candidates have successfully used curricular and additive educational opportunities aiming at a European and international dimension and have reached competence level 4 of the *ELOS DRAFT Common Framework for Europe Competence*². They have given evidence of their intercultural ability to act by their participation in a European / international cooperation project. Therewith they meet the standards of international universities and business enterprises to a special degree.

Variants to the above mentioned requirements are possible (for instance, the consideration of ancient languages, a graduated competence profile for further languages).

▪ Awarding conditions

- The *Excellence label of plurilingual, European and international competences CERTILINGUA* is awarded by schools and educational institutions which are formally accredited by topmost school authorities either on a national level or on the level of the federal states. The prerequisites for accreditation are the proof of the educational provisions which are required for the baccalaureate label as well as proof of target agreements on objectives concerning the quality of these offers or the performance to be attained by the graduate.

² *DRAFT Common Framework for Europe Competence*,
http://www.europelearning.info/downloads/europe_competence_framework_may_2006_def.doc



- The accredited school awards a graduate the *Excellence label of plurilingual, European and international competences CERTILINGUA* if he or she has successfully graduated from the appropriate educational offers and has submitted the required proof thereof. Prerequisite is a documentation of the achievements on the baccalaureate diploma. Criteria for the documented European / international project will be developed in a cooperation of the international partners.
- The accreditation is to be renewed at regular intervals. Quality control is the responsibility of the school authorities of the respective countries. The partaking countries cooperate in an international network on the evaluation and further development of the *Excellence label of plurilingual, European and international competences CERTILINGUA*.

Advantages and expected benefits

The following direct and indirect advantages are expected of an excellence label which documents plurilingual, European and international competences:

- Gifted and ambitious graduates get an incentive to achieve above-average results in the domains of language and cultural learning, as well as yielding social involvement.
- The access to universities abroad and to the international world of business is facilitated for the students.
- The label offers a negotiation option of exemption from language examinations which are required for the international university access.
- Existing binational agreements can be integrated and complemented by additional distinguishing marks. For instance, graduates with the double qualification AbiBac who are especially qualified for education and for taking on a leading role in the German – French sphere, can give evidence of additional internationally important competences with the *Excellence label of plurilingual, European and international competences CERTILINGUA*.
- Institutions of training and further training are given an achievement profile according to international standards that they can use for the integration of applicants into their offers of training and further training.



- Schools which have established plurilingual education, bilingual classes/courses (CLIL/EMILE), international projects, exchange programmes and partnerships can distinguish themselves with the accreditation and so obtain an incentive to provide these opportunities long-term.
- The label enhances to a special degree school development, teacher training and further training with regard to plurilingualism, linguistic competence, bilingualism, European and international involvement and active citizenship, the way it is demanded by the Council of Europe and the European Commission.
- The international cooperation of schools and school administrations as well as the mobility and integration of students, teachers and language assistants are supported.
- State schools become internationally more attractive through the expansion of foreign language teaching on non-language courses and through a high level of European and international orientation. This is especially relevant in areas with international political and economic relations.
- It facilitates, in connection with advancement in the national language, the integration of children of employees of foreign business enterprises, as well as children of foreign families and migrants and ensures an international recognition of their secondary school graduation.

Further procedure

Representatives of the federal states of the Federal Republic of Germany as well as representatives of the ministries of education of Belgium, France, Luxemburg, Austria, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands participate in the conception of the *Excellence label of plurilingual, European and international competences CERTILINGUA*. Further European partner countries have already pronounced an interest in their participation. The lead management lies with North Rhine - Westphalia.



European conferences took place at the Landesinstitut für Schule/Qualitätsagentur in Soest on 24/25 October 2005, in Brussels on 12/13 June 2006 at the invitation of the Ministre de la recherche des technologies nouvelles et des Relations extérieures de la Région wallone and on 09/10 November 2006 in The Hague at the invitation of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

The start of the pilot project is scheduled for school year 2007/08. A debut ceremony is planned for spring 2007.

Per participating country, in the Federal Republic of Germany per federal state, a limited number of schools are allotted for the trial.

Pilot schools will be accredited for 3 years by the topmost school authorities of their country.

Schools accomplishing the requirements already at the outset of the trial, obtain the possibility to award the first certificate already in 2008. For other schools, this possibility is given after two years.

The participating schools and school administrations cooperate in a European network. After the first year, a progress report will be compiled and the admittance of further partners and schools made possible.

Perspectives

For the further development of the project, additional corresponding labels for the *General Certificate of Secondary Education (CERTLINGUA JUNIOR)* and *Vocational Education and Training (CERTILINGUA JOB)* are planned as well.